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JANUARY, JANUS AND THE MERCHANT'S TALE

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JANUARY AND THE MERCHANT'S TALE

Although the fabliau is often described as the most realistic genre of the middle ages, it is generally recognized that its characters tend to group themselves into a number of familiar types -- the jealous husband, the lecherous monk, and so forth -- who are more caricatures than real people. They are sometimes distinguished by unusual descriptive details, by quirks or oddities which seem to be drawn from real life, but these details are of a grotesque or exaggerated sort designed to underscore the broad humor of the tale rather than to develop the inidividualism of the character.[1] It was once customary to speak of Chaucer's greatest contribution to the genre in terms of the descriptive realism and depth of psychology which he, along with Boccaccio, was the first to introduce; but in recent years it has been convincingly demonstrated that he could, at the same time, develop the abstract or typical side of his characters with particular subtlety as well.[2]

The Merchant's Tale provides an excellent example of this dual process which only a few critics have attempted to define. In the mid-forties John McGalliard wrote a pair of articles in which he first observed that "although January and May are by no means abstract characters," Chaucer did think of them as "exemplifying youth and old age;"[3] but then went on to speak of the "full and rich psychological characterization" of Januarie as the primary achievement of the tale.[4]

There is an unresolved paradox here which nevertheless comes very close to the heart of Chaucer's method of characterization in the fabliaux, a method which can create a figure who is at once a moral type or abstraction and at the same time a memorably realized individual. In a perceptive essay on "Irony in the Merchant's Tale" J. A. Burrow explained this technique as a "loose, flexible, and intermittent" kind of allegory, which "is at work generalizing and equating" even as the characters continue to develop very real and individual personalities:

> The point here is that this generalizing impulse (characteristic of allegory) exists side by side in Chaucer with the ironic or satiric impulse (characteristic of the fabliau) which tends to isolate its object and particularize it. . . . The poem owes as much to the allegory as to the fabliau, bringing to the anecdotal clarity of the latter a scope and significance which belong to the former tradition.[5]

More recently D. W. Robertson has seen this combination as a fundamental procedure not just in Chaucer's fabliaux but throughout his poetry, manifested above all in "Chaucer's tendency to mingle details of an iconographic nature with other details which produce an effect of considerable verisimilitude."[6] In the following discussion of the principle characters in the Merchant's Tale I would like to examine more specifically the sources of certain details in the portrait of Januarie, and to demonstrate Chaucer's unique ability to describe personal traits and feature which are simultaneously lifelike and

iconographically significant.

The story of the senex amans made foolish by his young wife was old long before Chaucer came to it, and the episode of the pear tree was a popular joke which survives today in a number of analogues. Nevertheless, Chaucer's version of the tale constitutes one of his most original narratives, a true masterpiece in his bawdy vein. Along with a number of other innovations, Chaucer is generally credited with having been the first to give the names Januarie and May to the ancient types of the jaloux and his young bride, so that even as he breathed new life into their portraits he also gave them a symbolic dimension which they had not enjoyed before.[7] Deschamps had written a ballad "Contre les mariages disproportionés" in which he used "Janvier" and "Avril" as metaphorical characters,[8] and Chaucer's friend Gower refers to "Decembre" and "Juil" in a similar context in the Confessio Amantis.[9] But it is not until some twenty years later, in Lydgate's Temple of Glass, that we find an exact parallel to Chaucer's couple:

> For it ne sit vnto fresshe May
> For to be coupled to oolde Ianuari. (184-85)[10]

The appropriateness of the names is obvious and has often been remarked. But their function goes beyond the simple analogies between old age and winter, youth and spring, and the opposition of the senex amans and his bride which they serve to reinforce. The names suggest a mode of characterization which is iconographic rather than realistic. Chaucer several times refers to May by the masculine form of her name (e.g. "this mayden, which that Mayus highte," 1693), because,

as both Skeat and Robinson point out, the name of the month was masculine.[11] It was not simply a metrical convenience, since the feminine form "Maia" would have been just as expedient and certainly more logical. For Chaucer the identification of May with the month was more important than grammatical appropriateness.

The extent to which this identification dominates Chaucer's conception of personality in the tale is sometimes remarkable. In his most extensive description of her appearance Chaucer will say no more of May than this:

> I may yow nat devyse al hir beautee.
> But thus muche of hire beautee telle I may,
> That she was lyk the brighte morwe of May,
> Fulfild of alle beautee and pleasaunce. (1746-49)

The repetition of the words "may" and "beauty" three times in a row is not clumsy, but deliberate. What looks at first like a particularly bad bit of poetry is really a precise expression of her character, for she is less an individual than a type, or state of mind. Nor was it for lack of words that (as Muscatine notes) Chaucer called her "fresshe May" fifteen times in the course of the tale.[12]

Robertson explains the significance of this characterization by the fact that the month of May was traditionally associated with "amoenitas" and luxuria,[13] a point well expressed by the thoroughly conventional description of the month in Trevisa's translation of Bartholemeus' De proprietatibus rerum:

> May is a tyme of myrthe, of loue/ of gladnesse, and of lykinge. For mooste in Maye the byrdes synge and make Joye. . . . In May wodes wax grene/ medous spryng and flourishe/ and well nyghe all thynges the whiche ben alyue ben moued to Joie and to loue/ . . . For then is temperatnes of ayre/ and myrthe and lykynge is dowblyd among men. For May is a tyme of solace and of lykynge. (IX. xiii) [14]

The relevance of this kind of atmosphere to the behavior of May in the Merchant's Tale should be obvious. It demonstrates above all that her character is less the portrait of an individual woman than the embodiment or personification of an idea.

A more intriguing suggestion of Robertson's is the possibility that Chaucer's May might have been inspired by the representation of May as a young girl holding flowers which sometimes appears in the illuminations of medieval calendars.[15] He provides one example from a fourteenth century French book of hours, and we may add another from the Peterborough Psalter, done in England about 1370 and therefore very much a part of Chaucer's world.[16] Although the icon was originally assigned to the month of April,[17] by the fourteenth century it seems to have been employed just as frequently for May. The reason for this may lie in the probable source of the image, the description of Flora and the Floralia in the chapter on May in Ovid's Fasti.[18] As Ovid explains at the beginning of his account, her festival extends from the last three days in April through the first three days of May, and either month is a fitting time to sing her praises (Fasti V. 183-88).[18a]

More importantly, Ovid's description of the nymph has a

number of interesting parallels to the Merchant's Tale. Flora was carried off by her husband and kept in a fruitful garden fanned by breezes and watered by a fountain ("fecundus dotalibus hortus in agris/ aura fovet, liquidae fonte rigatur aquae," V. 209-10). The garden enjoyed perpetual spring, and featured a tree which was always green ("arbor habet frondes . . . semper," V. 208). There she carried on her amorous games, marked by extreme wantonness and libertine play ("lascivia maior . . . in ludis liberiorque iocus," V. 331-2), for she was not restrained in her behavior ("severus," V. 333). She teaches us to enjoy life's flower while it blooms ("monet aetatis specie, dum floreat, uti," V. 353). One thinks immediately of May in Januarie's paradise, of

> The beautee of the gardyn and the welle,
> That stood under a laurer alwey grene, (2036-37)

and of the "game" she plays with Damyan. But the features of Januarie's garden had become commonplace in medieval poetry, and although Chaucer certainly knew the Fasti well enough, it would be unwise to emphasize too strongly the influence of this remote analogue. It is only one source among many for the description of the hortus conclusus in the Merchant's Tale. It is, however, of primary importance in explaining why it is a character named May who is brought in to this garden to play a little joke on her husband, and in showing how the iconography of the medieval calendar may have contributed to Chaucer's conception of his protagonists. This contribution, as I hope to show, was much more extensive in the case of Januarie.[18b]

II

Most critics would agree that although Damyan and May, Placebo and Justinus are little more than fabliau caricatures, the portrait of Januarie is more fully realized and more lavishly developed in terms of the old man's very human personality. Various features in his description, as well as his behavior, have been praised for their striking realism and originality. But some of the most lifelike or "realistic" details may actually be traced to the conventional representations of January in medieval cycles of the months, and to the descriptions of Janus in the most commonplace handbooks. For "January" was more to the medieval audience that simply a cold month in winter; he was a recognizable figure with a whole series of familiar attributes, who looked out at them from the pages of their psalters and stared down from the doorways of their cathedrals. The characteristics of this figure are used to enrich the portrait of Januarie in the Merchant's Tale; and the comparison of the two makes for a good deal of humor which can be missed if the parallel is ignored.

One of the most unforgettable moments in the poem is Januarie's affirmation that in spite of his age he is still sexually potent. In discussing the possible influence of Deschamp's ballad "Contre les marriages disproportiones" upon the tale, William Matthews found particularly suggestive "the similarity of imagery and double entendre" between Januarie's comparison of himself to a "blosmy tree" and the description of Janvier in Deschamp's poem:

Et Janvier a toujours le froit au col,

Son arbre sec et au nés la rupie,
Le chief de noif et pelez com saint Pol.[19]

Considering his admiration for Deschamps, Chaucer might well have taken a hint from this passage; but what he does with his analogy is something quite different. His Januarie is not in any sense an "arbre sec":

Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee;
And blosmy tree nys neither drye ne deed.
I feele me nowhere hoor but on myn heed;
Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene. (1461-11)

Januarie is not describing his dotage, but seeking to express the paradoxical combination of old age and youthful vigor which he claims to enjoy. His boast is a slightly more refined version of what the Reeve had described as the desire of every old man -- "To have an hoor head and a grene tayl, as hath a leek" (A. 3878-79).

Januarie's image of himself, hoar of head and green of "limb," simultaneously virile and decrepit, is strikingly original and wonderfully real; it reveals his personality completely. But the concept which lies behind it is a traditional one, for in medieval cycles of the months January was often portrayed with two faces, one of an old and the other of a young man.[20] It is important to realize that these cycles of the months quite literally surrounded

Chaucer and his fourteenth century audience, in illuminated psalters, breviaries and books of hours, as well as in the stained glass and sculpture of their cathedrals. Chaucer reveals his familiarity with the image in the Franklin's Tale, ll. 1252-3, where "Janus sit by the fyr, with double berd,/ And drynketh of his bugle horn the wyn." Nine manuscripts contain the gloss "Janus biceps" (the adjective used by Ovid in Fasti I.65 and Ex Ponto 4.4.23); two others have "Ianus bifrons" (the more common epithet found in Virgil, Aeneid 7. 180, 12.198, and most of the mythographers); and a single manuscript has simply "Ianus."[21]

In the classical period the two faces of Janus had not been distinguished; he says of himself in the Fasti that "ante quod est in me postque videtur idem" (I. 114). But since they represented the close of the old and the beginning of the new year,[21a] the artists of the middle ages sought to express the change in their sculptured and painted representations. The distinction in age seems to have been a refinement of the Gothic period; the earliest example I have found (c. 1140) is on the southern portal of the west facade of the Abbey at St. Denis -- one of the great architectural monuments which helped to form the Gothic style in France. There January is two-faced, the older, bearded visage looking at a door through which an old man is departing on the right, and the younger, clean-shaven face regarding the entrance of a youth on the left.[22] The relief on the Royal Portal of the cathedral at Chartres, completed soon after 1145, shows the two-headed figure feasting at his table, with a full beard in front and a clean-shaven face to the rear.[23] Essentially the same tableau is presented

in the emblem of JANVARIVS in the 12th century English MS 42 of St. John's College Cambridge, where the face on the right is plain and that on the left has a long, forked beard; one drinks from a horn while the other is eating bread.[24] In the mid-thirteenth century book of hours from northern France (New York, Morgan Library MS M153) which Tuve describes, the Janus figure again has only one beard.[25] And finally a much later example, in the elegant fifteenth century manuscript known as the Belles Heures de Jean Duc de Berry, will illustrate the persistence of this motif. On folio 2 January is represented by two men seated back to back: a beardless youth eating bread on the left and a white-bearded old man drinking wine from a bowl on the right.[26]

There is a common variation on this design in which the younger face is not simply clean-shaven but distinguished by a beard shorter and more neatly trimmed than that of the older countenance. This refinement appears for example on the twelfth century sculptured slab from the cathedral at Ferrara, where the old face to the right has a long, full beard, while the younger face to the left has a short-cropped and curly one.[27] Similar in conception is the Janus figure in Oxford MS Bodley 614, an English manuscript from the third quarter of the twelfth century, with a short beard on the right and a longer forked beard and mustache on the left.[28] There is a thirteenth century example of this design on an archivolt of the Pieve di Santa Maria in Arezzo, which displays a two-headed figure preparing his feast, a long, wavy beard on the front and a short trim beard to the rear, with the inscription HIC EST BIFRONS IANVARIVS clearly legible above.[29]

Although there were other emblems for the month (notably those of a woodcutter, a man warming himself by the fire, or Janus between two doors), the image of January eating or drinking at his table was by far the most common. Furthermore, according to Webster, the preference for the two-headed Janus figure in this scene of revelry was especially marked in English calendars.[29a] One cannot help but think of Chaucer's Januarie at his wedding feast, the palace "ful of instrumentz and of vitaille," on the evening of his longed for rejuventation. Of course a man needs no excuse, iconographic or otherwise, to banquet on his wedding night; but there is no question that it is in the soon-to-be enjoyed embrace of his young bride that Januarie hopes to recapture the youth which has passed him by. And when he finally takes May into his arms, the emblematic heritage of his portrait suddenly obtrudes itself with grotesque results:

> He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte;
> With thilke bristles of his berd unsofte,
> Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere --
> For he was shave al newe in his manere --
> He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face (1823-27).

Before us we behold a parody of the younger January in the calendars. For its greater emphasis I prefer to retain the reading thilke (line 1824) which occurs in the best manuscripts (including both the Ellesmere and Hengwrt), rather than the picturesque but illogical thikke adopted in most modern editions.[30] It makes no real difference, however, whether Januarie's beard is clean-shaven stubble or just newly trimmed; as we have seen, both fashions were used to distinguish the younger side of the month in medieval calendars.

In either case it is a striking departure from the often mentioned "source" of Januarie's description at this point -- the old husband of Agape in Boccaccio's Ameto, whose "barba grossa e prolissa" confirms his age and dismays his bride.[31]

The description of Januarie in bed with May is often singled out as an example of the coarse and startling naturalism which lends the tale an almost brutal quality. Burrow observes that "the reader is forced to visualize the scene, as never in the French fabliau, to grasp its human reality; and in the process the moral issues, with which the French authors were not concerned, come alive."[32] This is quite true as far as it goes. But the detail is not simply "realism of the crudest and most grotesque order," as Maurice Hussey describes it;[33] it is an iconographically significant detail brought vividly to life, and exaggerated for comic effect. In Chaucer's ironic portrait of Januarie it is not the resemblance of the ageing knight to the calendar icon which is important, but their ultimate disparity. Like the wines and spices which he drinks "t'encressen his corage," Januarie's newly-shaven beard is a pathetic and unsuccessful attempt to regain his lost youth. The image is droll enough simply as a realistic detail, but it is doubly ludicrous as a futile gesture in contrast with the January of the calendars whose rejuvenation is magically accomplished with every turning year.

Placed in this context the appearance of Januarie the next morning is truly grotesque. He sings, but his voice cracks; he is "al coltissh, ful of ragerye," but the slack skin shaking about his neck betrays the ultimate failure of his attempt to find new life with his

young bride. It is a matter of doubt whether his sexual vigor is to be attributed to longevity or to the onset of what we would call today his "second childhood." Like the familiar icon of the month, Januarie certainly combines the features of youth and old age; but when this paradox expresses itself in the form of "senile lechery," as Tatlock called it, it becomes ridiculous, and even repulsive.

The entire scene illustrates the manner in which the vivid realism of Chaucer's poetic surface may be constructed upon a foundation of conventional imagery. It is a kind of ironic epiphany which simultaneously reveals Januarie's character as a person and his heritage as a personification, placing the two in opposition with ludicrous results. But the appearance of Januarie "shave al newe in his manere" is not the most important feature of his portrait dependent upon the iconographic tradition of the month; that honor must be reserved for the silver key which is never out of his possession.

III

Shortly after his wedding Januarie constructs the garden which is to provide a setting for the "paradys terrestre" he hopes his marriage will be. The garden has a host of literary antecedents, the most important being the garden of Deduit in Le Roman de la Rose to which it is explicity compared. Its principal features are conventional, with the exception of one memorable detail:

This noble knyght, this Januarie the olde,
Swich deyntee hath in it to walke and pleye,

That he wol no wight suffren bere the keye
Save he hymself; for of the smale wyket
He baar alwey of silver a clyket,
With which, whan that hym leste, he it unsette. (2042-47)

On the narrative level Januarie's precious key is an effective indication of his possessive and uxorious nature. More than that, Paul Olson would argue, "the blind and fearful January who clings to his wife with one hand and clutches in the other the key to the garden where he can lock her up" is a kind of "moral image" of avarice in marriage.[34] But it is an emblem which depends upon a long iconographic tradition for its full significance, for the key belonged to January long before it made its appearance in the Merchant's Tale.[34a]

The key was originally the principle identifying attribute of the Roman god Janus, whom Ovid refers to in the Fasti as "deus claviger" -- the key-bearing god (I.228). It appears subsequently as an attribute of January in illuminated calendars from the beginning of the ninth to the end of the fourteenth century.[35] One of the sources from which Chaucer might well have gained familiarity with the image is the capsule description of the god in the fourteenth century Libellus de Deorum Imaginibus, which explains that Janus

> duas facies habebat, quarum una ante se, altera post se respiciebat. Juxta illum quoque erat templum, et in manu eius dextera habebat clavem, qua templus ipsum aperire monstrabat.[36]

The only known illuminated manuscript of the Libellus (Vatican Library

MS Reg. lat. 1290, c. 1420), reproduced in full by Liebeschutz, shows Janus seated before his temple and inserting his key into the lock on its door.

The effect of this image in relation to the Merchant's Tale is devastatingly ironic. Once again it is not the similarity between Januarie and his iconographic forebears which is important, but their ludicrous disparity. The key of Janus had identified him as the presiding deity of all gateways. As Macrobius explains, "apud nos Janum Praesse Januis, nomen ostendit . . . nam et cum clavi ac virga figuratur, quasi omnium portarum custos et rector viarum."[37] Even Chaucer prays to him as "Janus, god of entree," (Troilus, II.77), and one scribe makes note of the invocation with the marginal gloss "Janus deus introit" (B.M. MS Harleian 2392). In this office Janus was so powerful and secure that he could regulate the comings and goings of Jupiter himself.[38] But for all his careful precautions with the key to his garden gate, Januarie cannot even prevent the entrance of his own squire, Damyan.

This failure is precipitated by a mishap which is the crowning insult to his pretensions. For just as he thought to have achieved all that he desired, Fortune suddenly "biraft him bothe his yen" (2067) and left him powerless to defend his paradise. It falls in line with our comic vision of Januarie -- so blatantly wrong in his confident assertions about the joys of marriage, so outrageously mistaken in his choice of a bride -- to have him blind in love and blind in fact, yet still confident of his ability to control his wife and guard his Eden. But to any member of Chaucer's audience who had ever seen a calendar or read Ovid or Macrobius or any one of

a dozen other authorities, there is a very special humor in the distance between the January who "loketh upon both sides"[39] or the Janus who sees both East and West[40] and regards the future as well as the past,[41] and "This Januarie, as blynd as is a stoon" (2156). Macrobius tells us that Janus had two faces to demonstrate his omniscient awareness of all that transpired around him, both in front and behind,[42] and Ovid compares him to a porter who sees anyone passing through his door:

> utque sedens primi vester prope limina tecti
> ianitor egressus introitusque videt. (Fasti, I.137-38)

It is the crowning irony of the tale that Januarie is unable to see when Damyan unlocks his gate and enters the garden before his very eyes.

There is, however, a more serious aspect to the irony created by Januarie's divergence from the traditional iconography. In the Libellus Janus holds the key to his "temple," but in Ovid's Fasti, which was the source of this image, that key unlocks the gate to heaven itself. The importance of this fact as a gloss upon the Merchant's Tale lies in Januarie's conception of his marriage as "hevene in erthe heere." The disparity between Janus, the guardian of the heavenly court ("caelestis ianitor aulae," Fasti I.139) and the lecherous old knight who so jealously protects his earthly paradise serves to underscore the moral implications of Januarie's actions. Januarie's garden is a mockery of the "verray hevene" which he hopes to reach. His "smale wyket" is a pitiful reminder of the gates of heaven between which January is portrayed in so many medieval calendars

and cathedrals.[43]

The incongruity of Januarie's dreams and the reality of his marriage is an important theme throughout the tale, creating an atmosphere of foolishness and delusion in which Januarie's ultimate fall seems inevitable. Januarie hopes to find in May his "paradys terrestre" (1332), but he is warned by his brother Justinus that "paraunter she may be youre purgatorie" (1670). Chaucer refuses to tell us what May thought of their union, "or weither hire thoughte it paradys or helle" in Januarie's embrace (1964) -- though we can guess. But the potential for ambiguity was inherent in the figure of Janus himself, and a similar uncertainty with regard to his location was voiced by Macrobius in citing one authority who claimed that Janus was pictured with two faces "as if he were the doorkeeper of both heaven and hell."[44] This uncertainty creates a tension which is central to the tale's effect. Januarie's garden is supposed to be a "hevene in erthe," but it is the playground of the infernal deities Pluto and Prosperina. Januarie summons his "white spouse" to enter into the garden with language unmistakably reminiscent of the Song of Songs,[45] but his garden is more like the pomarium of Susannah and the Elders than the hortus conclusus of Solomon.[46] All of these uncertainties are resolved for the worse when Januarie's paradise does indeed become a purgatory; but we really knew it would all along. Januarie might stand by his garden gate and proclaim, like the Janus of old, "Praesideo foribus caeli,"[47] but all that he really commands is a paradise for fools.

All of the features so well established in the familiar

iconography of January which we have been discussing -- the paradoxical combination of youth and old age, the ability to see in both directions at once, the key and the gates to heaven -- are used to ironic ends by Chaucer, both to increase the humor in the portrait of Januarie and to comment upon the values he possesses. Together with the simpler characterization of May, the treatment of Januarie constitutes a brilliant travesty of the emblematic figure whose name he bears. The iconographic tradition of the months in medieval art and literature thus contributes an important symbolic dimension to the story of what happens "whan tendre youthe hath wedded stoupyng age," and helps to show how Chaucer's most vivid realism may be combined with allegory of the richest kind.

NOTES

1. The first real criticism of the fabliau as a genre was Joseph Bédier's famous study, Les Fabliaux: Études de littérature populaire et d'histoire littéraire du moyen age, 6th ed. (Paris: Champion, 1964). It was Bédier who first described "leur étroit réalisme" (368) and distinguished between "l'esprit réaliste des fabliaux" and "l'espirit idéaliste" of the courtly romance. In discussing the literary qualities of the fabliaux he observed that "dans la peinture des personnages . . . ils excellent à saisir l'attitude, le geste" (349), although he found "nulle prétention au coloris ni à la finesse psychologique" (357). Bédier had special praise for the naturalness of their style: "comme ses portraits ne sont jamais embellis plus que de raison, de même les caricatures ne sont pas trop chargées. Sous l'exagération nécessaire et voulue des traits, on retrouve la nature" (351). Subsequent treatments of the genre vary mainly in their emphasis. On the one hand, in an important revisionist study, Les Fabliaux: Étude d'histoire littéraire et de stylistique médiévale (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1957), Per Nykrog speaks of "la virtuosité avec laquelle certains de nos poètes savent former un caractère," and he maintains that "les portraits que tracent nos conteurs, sont parfois remarquablement vivants et réalistes" (133). On the other hand, in their collection of

Fabliaux: Ribald Tales from the Old French (New York: Crowell, 1965), translators Robert Hellman and Richard O'Gorman maintain that "the characters are stock figures or conventional types, most often barely individualized and without development" -- although "they are at least full of life" (188-89). But perhaps the fairest evaluation of the fabliaux is that presented by Robert Harrison in his recent collection: "on no account should they be taken as realistic portrayals of life in medieval France. True, there is an air of reality about them -- the sudden flashes of insight into personality as speakers give themselves away, the homely ring of the dialogue, the detailed scenes of everyday life, the descriptions of harness and weapons and tools and cooking utensils and clothing -- but these things are only the trappings of verisimilitude, not reality itself. To the core the fabliaux are burlesques, and their personages are not so much individuals as caricatures of social and psychological types." (Gallic Salt, University of California: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1974), pp. 10-11). Both qualities -- realism and caricature -- are essential ingredients, and their intermingling throughout the fabliaux as a genre bears upon our understanding of Chaucer's method of characterization in the Merchant's Tale.

2. An extremely useful review of the criticism of Chaucer's fabliaux will be found in D. S. Brewer's chapter on "The Fabliaux" in the Companion to Chaucer Studies, ed. Beryl Rowland (Toronto: Oxford,

1968), pp. 247-67, which traces the movement from early praise of the "pervading realism" of the fabliaux in Germaine Dempster, Dramatic Irony in Chaucer (Stanford, 1932); through the discussion of the descriptive realism and depth of characterization which Chaucer brought to the genre by Percy Shelley, The Living Chaucer (Philadelphia, 1940) and Nevill Coghill, The Poet Chaucer (London, 1949); to the recognition of an allegorical dimension by John Speirs, Chaucer the Maker (London, 1951) and the emphasis on iconography and the abstract in D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1962).

3. "Chaucer's Merchant's Tale and Deschamp's Miroir de Mariage," Philological Quarterly, 25 (1946), p. 205. Some recent critics would emphasize this aspect of the character to the point of excluding any other: see for example Robert M. Jordan in "The Non-Dramatic Disunity of the Merchant's Tale," PMLA, 78 (1963), p. 296: "In this tale we are involved not with a person but with a personification. Our attention is engaged with consequences and moral generalizations, not with personality."

4. "Chaucerian Comedy: The Merchant's Tale, Jonson and Molière," P. Q., 25 (1946), p. 354.

5. "Irony in the Merchant's Tale," Anglia, 75 (1957), p. 208.

6. A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1962), p. 242.

7. J. S. P. Tatlock, "Chaucer's Merchant's Tale," Modern Philogy, 33 (1936), 377-79.

8. Adduced by William Matthews, "Eustache Deschamps and Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale'," MLR 51 (1956) 217-20.

9. (VII. 4297-4302). For this and some later examples see F. L. Utley, The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568 (Columbus, Ohio, 1944) pp. 102 and 286.

10. Quoted by C. F. E. Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900 (Cambridge, 1925), vol. I., p. 18.

11. See also ll. 1742 and 1888, and the note by Emerson Brown, Jr., "The Merchant's Tale: Why is May called 'Mayus'," Chaucer Review 2 (1968) 273-77 -- the argument of which, however, is less than convincing.

12. Chaucer and the French Tradition (Berkeley, 1957) p. 232.

13. Preface, p. 257.

14. I quote from the edition of Berthelet (London, 1535) fol. cxlii. The translation was made in Chaucer's lifetime. See also the description of "lusti Maii" in Gower's Confessio Amantis, VII. 1044-50.

15. Preface, p. 257 and Fig. 107 (Oxford, Bodleian MS Douce 62, fol. 7). Robertson's fig. 105 seems to be male rather than female; and in fact May in the calendars was usually masculine until the late examples, as Rosemond Tuve points out in Seasons and Months (Paris, 1933), p. 39 n. 55.

16. For a reproduction see Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World (Toronto, 1973), Fig. 41c.

17. J. C. Webster cites 33 examples of the flower-bearer icon for April in the comparative tables of The Labors of the Months in Antique and Medieval Art to the End of the Twelfth Century (Evanston and Chicago, 1938), pp. 175-79. Compare Trevisa's Bartholomeus, IX. xii: "April is paynted berynge a floure" (fol. cxlii). The original text of Bartholomeus was written c. 1230-1250.

18. The extensive influence of the Fasti on medieval illustrations of the seasons and months is discussed by Tuve, pp. 38-42, with special emphasis on the agreement of "the description of Flora and the Floralia with the symbolic representation of May with flowers, or crowned, in a springtime landscape," and on their resemblance to the "faire fresshe May" of "other poets."

18a. I quote from the Loeb edition by Sir J. G. Frazer (Harvard, 1926).

18b. A few critics have noted the relevance of the calendar icon of January to the portrait of Januarie in the Merchant's Tale, but none have considered how extensive is Chaucer's use of the traditional iconography on the one hand or how brilliantly he plays against it to heighten the comic effect of his ageing knight on the other. Robertson suggests that Januarie "with his desire for both 'paradis' on earth and 'Paradis' above is obviously two-faced, like Janus who sits, as we are told in the Franklin's Tale, 'by the fyr with double berd.'" Emerson Brown, Jr., in "Chaucer, the Merchant, and their Tale: Getting Beyond Old Controversies," Chaucer Review, 13 (1978), p. 254-5, thinks that "Januarie describes the bride he seeks through food imagery" in imitation of the January shown feasting in the calendars (p. 254-5). This essay was completed before I had a chance to see Brown's article, but since the argument which he draws from the calendar materials is quite different from mine the degree to which we overlap is slight.

19. Balade 1077, in the Oeuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps, ed. Le Marquis de Saint Hilaire and G. Raynaud (Paris: S.A.T.F., 1878-1903), vol. 5, pp. 63-64; quoted by Matthews in "Eustache Deschamps and Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale'," p. 219. The passage in Deschamp's Miroir de Mariage (ll. 117-26) cited by Skeat and Robinson is a no more likely source; it refers to the fact that trees extend their roots even in winter.

20. See Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century, trans. Dora Nussey (New York, 1958), p. 70. Mâle reproduces the quatrefoil bas-relief from the porch at Amiens and mentions numerous psalters which I have been unable to see, including Bibliothèque National MSS Lat. 1328, 238, 320, 828, 1394, the Arsenal "Psalter of St. Louis," and St. Geneva MSS 2200, 2690. Better reproductions of the Amiens cycle will be found in Amédée Boinet, La Cathédrale d'Amiens, 5th ed. (Paris: Laurens, 1959) Pl. XI; and in the Encyclopedia of World Art (New York, 1959-68), vol. II, pl. 24.

21. For the glosses see John Manly and Edith Rickert, The Text of the Canterbury Tales, Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts (Chicago, 1940), vol. III, p. 512.

21a. January "hath that name of a god feyned, that hyghte Janus: for to hym that month was halowed. And nowe that month hyght Januarius, for he is bond and gate of the yere. And he is paynted with two frontes, to shew and to teche the begynnynge and ende of the yere, as Ysidore saith, and is paynted eatynge, and drynknge of a cuppe" (Trevisa's Bartholemeus, IX.ix, fol. cxli verso; the source is Isidore's Etymologiae V.33.3). See also Fulgentius, Mitologiarum Liber, II.v; and Gower, Confessio Amantis, VII, 1204-14.

22. Photograph in A. Kingsley Porter, Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads (Boston, 1923), vol. X, fig. 1444; for the date,

see vol. I., p. 320. For a reliable description see Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 70; the description and drawing in Webster (catalogue no. 72) are hopelessly inaccurate.

23. For the date see Tuve, Seasons and Months, p. 127. A large and clear photograph is given in Emile Mâle, Notre Dame de Chartres (Paris: Flammarion, 1963) p. 65. Others will be found in Peter Kidson and Ursula Pariser, Sculpture at Chartres (London: Tiranti, 1958), Pl. 14; and Adolf Katzenellenbogen, The Sculpural Program of Chartres Cathedral (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1959), pl. 20. See further Abbé Bulteau, "Étude iconographique sur les calendriers figurés de la cathédrale de Chartres," in Memoires de la Société archéologique d'Eure et Loire, VII (Chartres, 1882).

24. There is a drawing in Webster, Labors of the Months, Plate LVIII; see p. 93 and catalogue no. 92 for descriptions.

25. Tuve, Seasons and Months, p. 158

26. Painted by the Limbourg brothers. Photograph in Phillippa Tristram, Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature (New York: N.Y.U., 1976), Plate 13.

27. The slab is now housed in the Museo del Duomo, Ferrara. There is a photograph in Webster, pl. XXVI (see p. 60, and catalogue no. 40 for descriptions); another reproduction will be found in the Encyclopedia of World Art, vol. VIII, PL. 171.

28. For descriptions see Tuve, p. 158; and Webster, catalogue no. 97. There are photographs in Webster, Pl. LXIII; and in Philippa Tristram, Figures of Life and Death, Pl. 14a.

29. Photographs in Adolfo Venturi, Storia dell'arte italiana (Hoepli: Milan, 1901-40) vol. III, Fig. 855; and the Encyclopedia of World Art, vol. XIII, Pl. 345.

29a. Webster, p. 93.

30. Robinson, who prefers thikke, notes thilke in El, Hg, Py, Gg, Pw, La, and Mg. For a complete list see Manly and Rickert, who note the frequent scribal confusion lk and kk, but (grudgingly) retain thilke in their text (III. 396). According to their corpus of variants only 20 MSS have thikke; the remaining 33 read thilke (VI.445).

31. See W. F. Bryan and Germain Dempster, Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Chicago, 1941), p. 339.

32. "Irony in the Merchant's Tale," p. 199.

33. The Merchant's Prologue and Tale (Cambridge, 1966), p. 93, n. 612f. Muscatine (p. 234) terms it simply "graphic ugliness."

34. "Chaucer's Merchant and January's 'Hevene in Erthe Heere'," ELH, 28 (1961), p. 206.

34a. Kenneth A. Bleeth, noting Robertson's comparison of Januarie with Janus, has observed that "in Ovid, Janus is a gatekeeper and is described as carrying a key:" "The Image of Paradise in The Merchant's Tale," in Larry D. Benson, ed., The Learned and the Lewd: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature, Harvard English Studies, 5 (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 56, n. 24. Brown, in "Old Controversies," elaborates upon this notion, pointing to Chaucer's ironic development of Januarie's "unsuccessful gatekeeping" in the Tale. He suggests that Chaucer used the idea of guarding passageways to establish a parallel between Januarie and the Merchant, who "wolde the see were kept for any thyng" (p. 255). Neither Bleeth nor Brown have mentioned the more important point that the key of Janus became an attribute of the icon for January in medieval calendars, thus establishing a background of familiar iconography against which Chaucer can place his own characterization of Januarie in the Merchant's Tale and confidently expect his entire audience (not just the learned classicists) to recognize its ironies.

35. See the calendar in the astrological manuscript dated 813-20 in the Vatican Library (MS gr. 1291) reproduced (but inaccuratly described) by Webster, no. 20, Plate IX; and the illuminated Catalan prose version of Matfre Ermengau's Breviari d'amor (H. Yates Thompson no. XCV) described by Tuve, p. 155 no 165. The latter is dated c. 1400, and shows a two-faced January with key in either hand.

36. Ed. Hans Liebeschutz, Fulgentius Metaphoralis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Mythologie im Mittelalter, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, IV (Berlin, 1926), p. 122. The exact date of the Libellus is unknown; E. H. Wilkins argues for its use by Chaucer in "Descriptions of Pagan Divinities from Petrarch to Chaucer," Speculum 32 (1957), pp. 511-22. His conclusions are accepted by D. C. Allen in Mysteriously Meant (Baltimore, 1970), p. 214 n. 39, but disputed by J. M. Steadman in "Venus' citole in Chaucer's Knight's Tale and Berchorius," Speculum 34 (1959), 620-24, and Erwin Panofsky in Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art (New York, 1967), p. 79 n.2.

37. Saturnalia, I.ix.7.

38. "It, redit officio Iuppiter ipse meo," he proclaims in Fasti I. 126.

39. Gower, Confessio Amantis, VII. 1209.

40. Ovid, Fasti, I.139-40.

41. "Quidam ideo eum dici bifrontem putant, quod et praeterita sciverit et futura providerit." Saturnalia, I.9.4; ed. Iacobus Willis (Leipzig: Teubner, 1970).

42. Janus "creditur geminam faciem praetulisse, ut quae ante quaeque post tergum essent intueretur." Saturnalia, I.7.20.

43. In addition to the portal of St. Denis described above, we may note the twelfth century mosaic in the cathedral at Aosta (Webster, cat. no. 35 and Plate XXI); the portal reliefs of the church at St. Jouin-de-Marnes (cat. no. 74); the paintings in the church of St. Isidore, León (cat. no. 83); the stained glass window above the choir in the cathedral of Chartres (thirteenth century; see Tuve, p. 137 and Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 70, n. 4); and two thirteenth century manuscripts: the Psalter of Ingeburge, Musée Condé, Chantilly (Tuve, p. 160) and the Psalter of St. Louis and Blanche of Castille, Arsenal 1186 (Tuve, p. 160; Mâle, p. 70 no. 4).

44. "Gavius Bassus [a contemporary of Cicero] in eo libro quem De dis composuit Ianum bifrontem fingi ait quasi superum atque inferum ianitorem," Saturnalia, I.9.13.

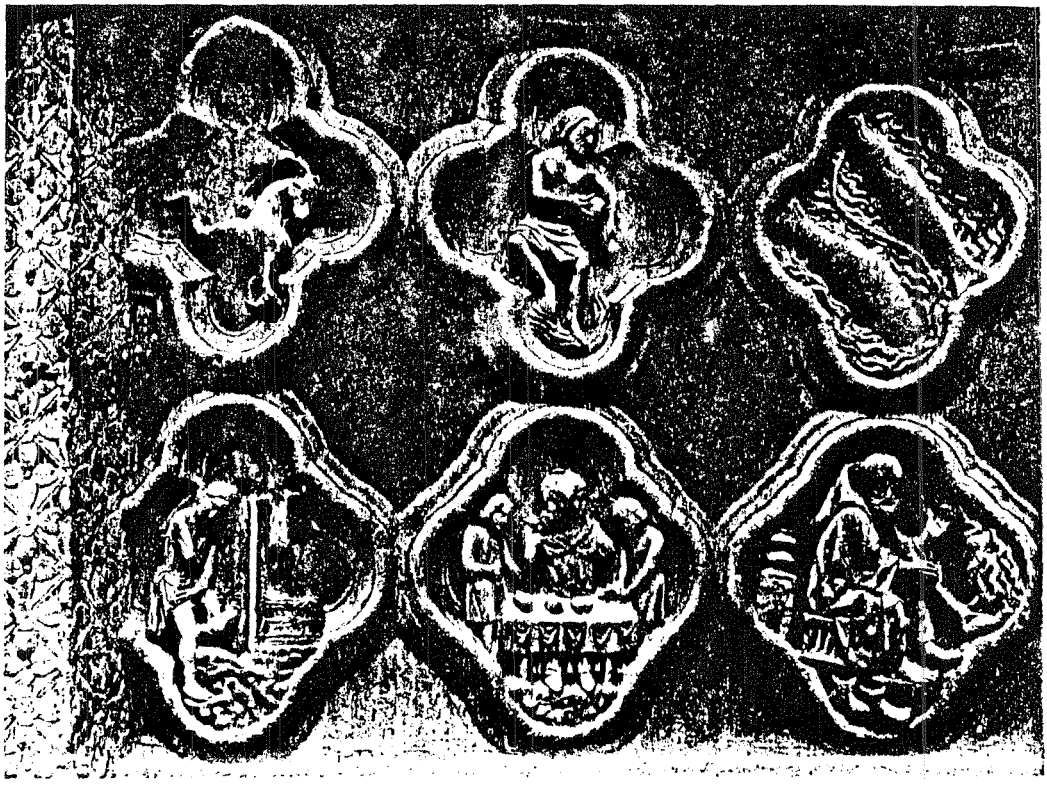
45. Merchant's Tale 2137-44. The allusion is noted by Skeat, Robinson, and many others. For discussion see D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach through Symbolism and Allegory," Speculum 26, (1951), 24-49, and especially p. 45: "The garden of the lover is the garden of the Canticum turned upside down for the purposes of ironic comedy. The Scriptural echoes in this passage are not mere literary decoration. They show the extreme foolishness to which cupidity like Januarie's may lead. For the doting knight, May represents what the lady in the Canticum represents to the

faithful: she is his Holy Church, his Blessed Virgin, his refuge from the transitory world."

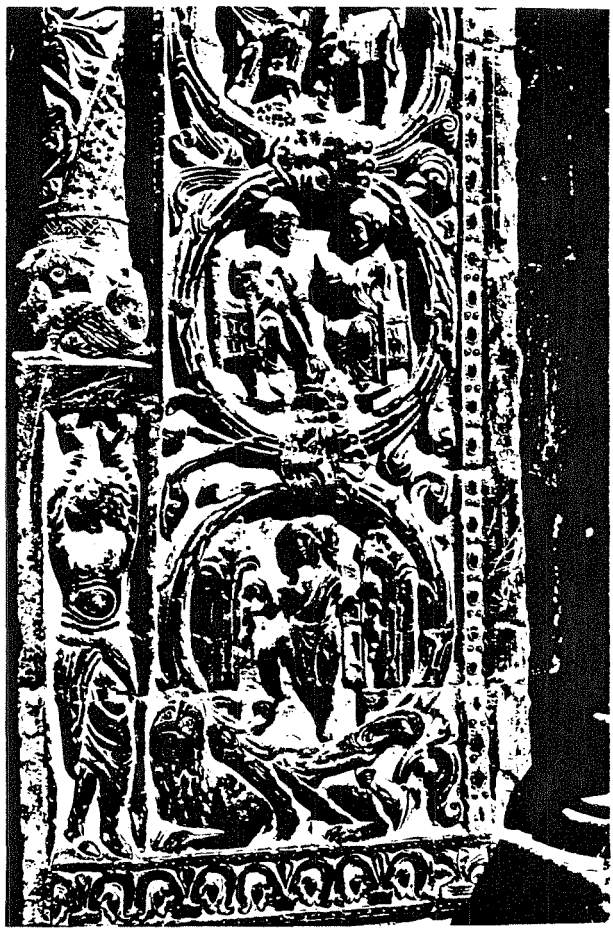
46. Persuasively argued by Alfred L. Kellogg in "Susannah and the Merchant's Tale," Speculum, 35 (1960), 275-79.

47. Fasti, I.125.

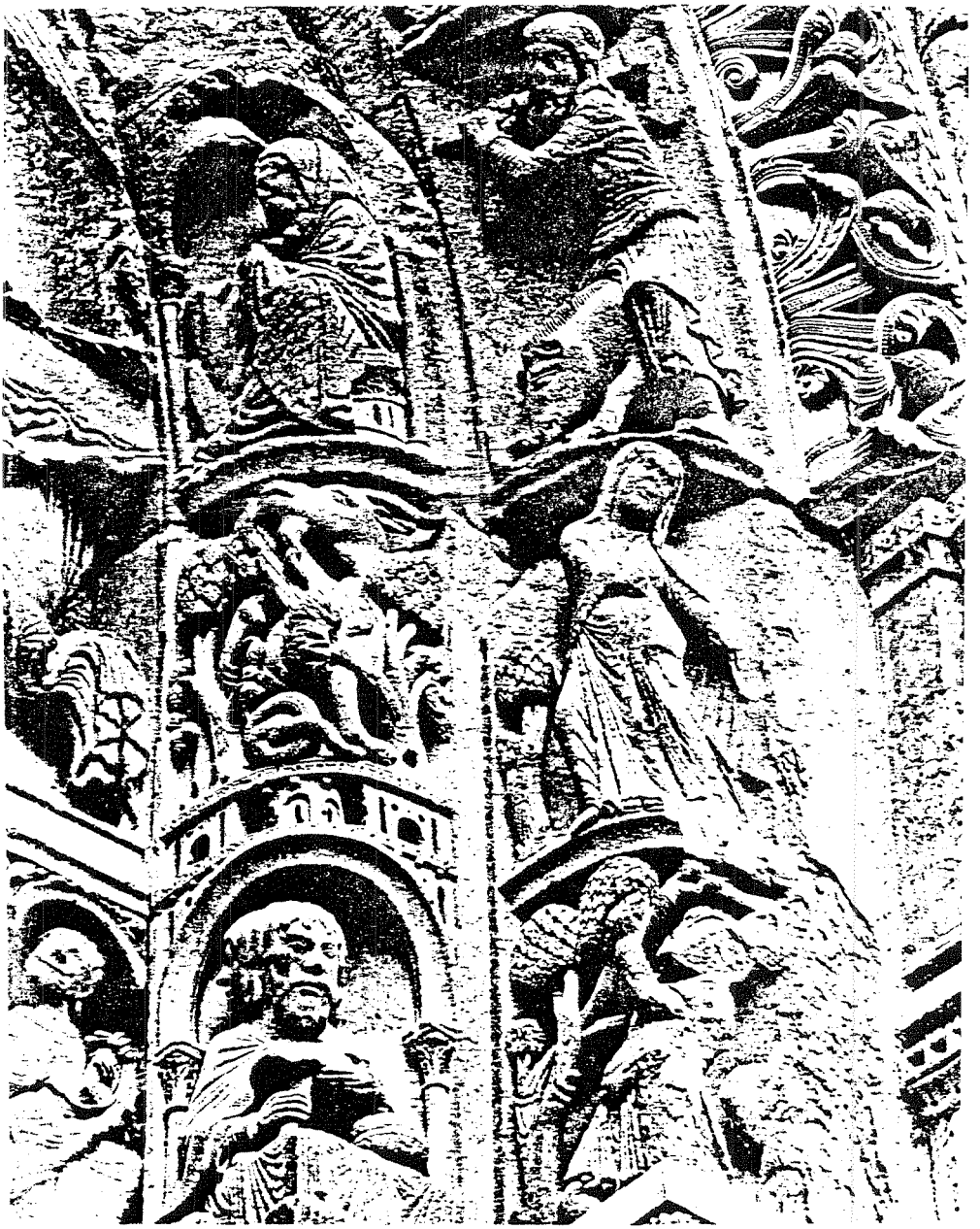
1. May, from the Peterborough Psalter, Cambridge, Corpus Christi MS 53, fol. 3. Circa 1320 (Pearsall & Salter)



2. December, January, and February, from the Porte Saint-Firmin, west front of the Cathedral of Amiens. Thirteenth century (Encyclopedia of World Art)



3. February and January, from the southern jamb of the southern portal, Western façade, Abbey of St. Dennis. Circa 1140 (Porter)



4. February and January, from the southern doorway of the Portail Royale, east façade of the Cathedral of Chartres. Circa 1240 (Mâle)

5. Januarius, from Cambridge, St. John's College MS 42.

Twelfth century (Webster)

6. January as Youth and Age, from Les Belles Heures de Jean Duc de Berry, f. 2. New York, Metropolital Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection. Early fifteenth century (Tristram)

7. January, sculptured slab from the Cathedral at Ferrara, now in the Museo del Duomo. Twelfth centruy (Webster)

8. January, from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 614 fol. 3. Mid-twelfth century (Webster)

9. January, from the Pieve di Santa Maria, Arezzo. Thirteenth century. (Encyclopedia of World Art)

10. Janus as "deus claviger," from the Libellus de deorum imaginibus. Rome, Vatican Library MS Reg. lat. 1290, fol. 4 recto. Circa 1420 (Liebeschutz)

11. Calendar, with January bearing key and staff in the second band at 3:00. Rome, Vatican Library MS gr. 1291. Ninth century (Webster)

12. Calendar, with January between two doors at 9:00, from the mosaic pavement at the Cathedral of Aosta (Webster)